



MONTGOMERY COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Isiah Leggett  
*County Executive*

Richard R. Bowers  
*Fire Chief*

June 2, 2009

Ms. Barbara Solberg, Project Manager  
Mail Stop C-102  
Office of Highway Design  
Maryland State Highway Administration  
707 N. Calvert Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Dear Ms. Solberg:

I am writing to you in my capacity as Fire Chief of the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) to express my opposition to the proposed Base Realignment and Closure – related improvements at the intersection of Old Georgetown Road (MD 187) and West Cedar Lane. Although I recognize the traffic issue at this intersection and applaud the State Highway Administration's (SHA) desire to address it, the solutions that you propose (whether Option #1 or Option #2), while potentially aiding the flow of traffic, create unacceptable public safety issues that negatively affect MCFRS response capabilities.

There are several reasons for my objection. First, as you know, Fire Station 20 is located on the southeast corner of the MD 187/West Cedar Lane intersection, fronting along MD 187. Presently, the front apron of Station 20 (i.e., distance from the engine room bay doors to the eastern edge of the public sidewalk) is approximately 29 feet long, but Engine 720 is 30 feet 6 inches long. MCFRS and national safety standards require fire-rescue personnel to check the operating status of fire apparatus on a daily basis. Because Engine 720 is longer than the apron, Station 20 staff – when performing apparatus checks, maintenance, and training – either leave the apparatus room door open causing the rear portion of the truck to extend into the building; or, if the engine room door remains closed, the front portion of the fire truck extends onto the public sidewalk. This latter situation forces pedestrians and bicyclists into the right-most travel lane of northbound MD187. Leaving the engine door open creates an additional health hazard – hazardous emissions from the fire truck are sent into the bay area and staff areas of Station 20. Alternatively, if the engine door remains closed and the fire truck extends onto the public side walk, there is a risk of injury to pedestrians passing by. Because both SHA proposals contemplate shortening the apron to the fire station, either option would only make this already difficult situation worse.

Office of the Fire Chief

Second, shortening the apron will increase the angle of departure for the fire truck as it pulls out or backs into the station. The increased angle of departure would make it more difficult to enter and exit the station and cause safety issues due to the height of fire apparatus, height of the bay doors, and ability of the apparatus driver to see pedestrian traffic on the sidewalk in front of the station.

Finally, even if the apron were not shortened, the proposed improvements call for the construction of either a hump or a valley (dip) – up to 6 inches in height/depth according to SHA engineers – in the center median of Old Georgetown Road. Although the hump or valley may alleviate drainage issues, it would, unfortunately, create issues for fire trucks turning in and out of the station because they would have to ride over the hump or valley every time they leave or return to the station, thereby impeding response time efficiency and causing unnecessary wear and tear on fire apparatus.

In conclusion, for the reasons stated above, I cannot support SHA's two proposed alternatives for improvements to the intersection of Old Georgetown Road and West Cedar Lane. The risk the SHA plan creates for our fire and rescue operations and response capabilities is simply too great. Although improving the traffic flow would certainly be desirable, it should not be done at the expense of the safety and welfare of our citizens.

I would like to propose a meeting between SHA and MCFRS personnel to discuss the concerns described above and to determine whether additional alternatives can be formulated for improvements to this intersection that will meet both SHA and MCFRS needs. Please contact Scott Gutschick, Planning Section Manager, on 240-777-2417 or at [scott.gutschick@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:scott.gutschick@montgomerycountymd.gov) to schedule the meeting. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard R. Bowers", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard R. Bowers  
Fire Chief

RB:ld

cc: Grant Davies, President, Bethesda Fire Department  
Larry Gaddis, Chief, Bethesda Fire Department  
Kenneth Hartman, Director, B-CC Regional Services Center

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cc: Gary Stith, Deputy Director, DGS  
Phil Alperson, Montgomery County BRAC Coordinator  
D/C Lohr, Operations Division, MCFRS  
B/C Resnick, Battalion 2, Operations Division, MCFRS  
June Evans, CIP/Facilities Section, MCFRS  
Scott Gutschick, Planning Section, MCFRS